

## Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 /029 W  
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R 161119Z FEB 78  
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INFO INS WASHDC  
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AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
AMEMBASSY MANILA  
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
USMISSION GENEVA  
AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

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INS/CO FOR CODEP (COEXM)

EO 11652: GDS  
TAGS: SREF  
SUBJ: IRC COMMISSION'S VISIT TO SONGKHLA

1. SUMMARY: LEO CHERNE LED AN IRC DELEGATION TO VISIT THE SONGKHLA BOAT CASE CAMP FEBRUARY 12. IN HIS MEETING WITH THE SONGKHLA GOVERNOR, CHERNE EMPHASIZED THAT THE COMMISSION HAD COME TO SONGKHLA TO LEARN ABOUT THE REFUGEE SITUATION THERE SO THAT IT COULD MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS UPON ITS RETURN TO THE U.S. ABOUT AMELIORATING THE REFUGEE BURDEN ON THAILAND. THE GOVERNOR, RECALLING HIS EXPERIENCE IN NORTHEAST THAILAND WITH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES OF ANOTHER ERA, EXPRESSED FEAR ABOUT LETTING ANY MORE INTO THAILAND. THE COMMISSION THEN SPENT TWO HOURS VISITING THE CAMP.

2. SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE IRC COMMISSION UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF LEO CHERNE VISITED SONGKHLA FEBRUARY 12. AN ADVANCE DELEGATION CON-  
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SISTING OF JAMES MICHENER AND ROBERT DEVECCHI HAD VISITED THREE OTHER CAMPS THE PREVIOUS WEEK. SONGKHLA REPRESENTED THE FOURTH OF TEN THAI CAMPS THAT THE COMMISSION IS SCHEDULED TO COVER.

3. THE GOVERNOR AND THE PROVINCIAL STAFF RECEIVED THE COMMISSION AT THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE. THE CONSUL IN SONGKHLA HOSTED A LUNCH WHICH INCLUDED THE GOVERNOR AND HIS STAFF, AND SEVERAL WESTERN MIS-

SIONARIES. THE COMMISSION THEN SPENT TWO HOURS IN THE CAMP.

4. AFTER THE EXCHANGE OF COURTESIES AT THE RESIDENCE, CHERNE EMPHASIZED THAT AMERICAN EYES, AS WELL AS THOSE OF MUCH OF THE WORLD, HAD BEEN FOCUSING ON THE PARTICULAR REFUGEE BURDEN THAT THAILAND HAS BEEN CARRYING. HE SAID THAT THE COMMISSION HAD COME TO SONGKHLA TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF BOAT PEOPLE, THE RECEPTION ACCORDED THEM, AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THEY LIVE. THE COMMISSION WOULD THEN RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES TO SEE WHAT FURTHER THE US AND OTHER COUNTRIES MIGHT DO TO AMELIORATE THE REFUGEE BURDEN ON THAILAND.

5. CHERNE SAID THAT THE PRESS IN THE UNITED STATES AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WAS FILLED WITH STORIES ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ESCAPED BY BOAT. SOME OF THE STORIES SPOKE OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS. THE PROBLEMS OF GREATEST CONCERN WERE REFUSALS OF PERMISSION TO LAND. THE GOVERNOR EXPLAINED, (AS HE HAD TO THE AMBASSADOR JAN 27, BANGKOK 2896) THAT HIS TREATMENT OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES DEPENDED ON GOVERNMENT POLICY. HE HAD TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. SONGKHLA WAS THE CENTER FOR BOAT CASE REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED IN ANY OF THE 14 SOUTHERN PROVINCES. THERE WERE CURRENTLY 886 REFUGEES IN THE SONGKHLA CAMP, PLUS THREE SUSPECTED COMMUNISTS FROM NORTH VIETNAM IN THE SONGKHLA JAIL.

6. THE GOVERNOR RECALLED HIS SERVICE IN UBON PROVINCE OF NORTHEAST THAILAND, WHERE THERE WAS A CONCENTRATION OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAD ENTERED FROM LAOS STARTING IN 1946. HE SAID THEY HAD CREATED MANY PROBLEMS. "IF WE LET THE VIETNAMESE IN THEY WILL BE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY." THE BEST SOLUTION WAS FOR THIRD COUNTRIES TO ACCEPT THEM. CHERNE REPLIED THAT THE COMMISSION WOULD DEVOTE A MAJOR EFFORT TO ENLARGE THE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES THAT THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER COUNTRIES ACCEPT.

7. THE GOVERNOR SAID THAT THAI INTELLIGENCE DESCRIBED TWO PRINCIPAL MOTIVES FOR REFUGEE DEPARTURES FROM VIETNAM. THE SRV TRIES TO SEND OUT THOSE WHO OPPOSE THEM; OTHERS LEAVE BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT HAS SEIZED THEIR HOLDINGS. BOTH FACTORS MOTIVATE THE MANY CHINESE WHO ESCAPE. THEY HAVE THE MONEY TO PAY IN ADVANCE TO GET OUT, AND THEY ARRIVE IN BIG BOATS CARRYING SUCH GOODS AS REFRIGERATORS.

8. THE GOVERNOR MENTIONED THAT THE VIETNAMESE IN THE NORTHEAST LIVE COMFORTABLY, AND SEND LETTERS TO THEIR RELATIVES IN VIETNAM. HE WAS FEARFUL THAT IF SONGKHLA AUTHORITIES WERE MORE HOSPITABLE TOWARDS VIETNAMESE REFUGEES, THE REFUGEES WOULD WRITE LETTERS BACK TO THEIR RELATIVES IN VIETNAM TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO JOIN THEM IN THAILAND. THE GOVERNOR MENTIONED THAT WHEN DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OAKLEY HAD VISITED SONGKHLA JANUARY 14, THERE WERE JUST OVER 500 REFUGEES IN THE CAMP. THEN THE AMBASSADOR HAD COME TO SONGKHLA JANUARY 27, THERE

WERE JUST OVER 600. THE CURRENT FIGURE WAS NEARLY 900. THE VIET-NAMESE WERE FLOWING IN.

9. THE GOVERNOR EXPLAINED HIS PROBLEM WITH FOOD SUPPLIES IN THE CAMP. THERE IS AN ALLOCATION OF 3.75 BAHT PER DAY FOR ADULTS AND 2.75 FOR CHILDREN. CONTRACTORS TAKE .50 BAHT OF THE FIRST FIGURE, THUS LEAVING 3.25 WORTH OF RICE. PRISONERS IN THAI JAILS, IN CONTRADICTION, ARE ALLOCATED 7 BAHT PER DAY. STEVEN YOUNG OF THE COMMISSION ASKED WHY THE PROVINCE DIDN'T PURCHASE FOOD DIRECTLY RATHER THAN USE CONTRACTORS. THE GOVERNOR POINTED OUT THAT THE PROVINCE DID NOT HAVE FUNDS TO PURCHASE RICE IN ADVANCE. IF IT DID, THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CORRUPTION WOULD BE INCREASED.

10. JOHN RICHARDSON OF THE COMMISSION CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GROUP WAS CONSCIOUS OF THE MANY CLOSE HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN AMERICANS AND THAI, AND PROMISED TO MAKE AMERICANS MORE AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS THE REFUGEES CREATE FOR THAILAND.  
WHITEHOUSE

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## Message Attributes

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